

BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

A Case Study of Energy Efficient Purchasing Practices

Consortium for Energy Efficiency

In Support of

The Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Purchasing Initiative

Bexar County, Texas

Bexar County, located in South Central Texas, is one of the 254 counties in Texas. Bexar County and the City of San Antonio reflect a typical US County, and that information derived from this study would apply well as a model to other areas across the country.

Bexar County illustrates well the barriers to purchasing energy efficient equipment that face many municipal organizations throughout the United States. Specifically, Bexar County illustrates the difficulties of incorporating energy efficient concerns into purchase decisions due to:

- A bureaucratic and cumbersome decision-making process
- Misconceptions about energy efficiency
- No built-in incentives to consider energy efficiency in purchasing
- Lack of a formal “energy efficiency” policy

County Organization

Bexar County Government provides a range of services to its citizens. However in Texas, all decision-making authority ultimately rests with the Commissioners’ Court and the County Judge. This dispersion of power creates a cumbersome bureaucratic process that leads to virtual “micro management” of all county departments by a select group of elected officials called Commissioners.

The County Judge is the presiding officer of the Bexar County Commissioners Court as well as the spokesperson and ceremonial head of the County government. The Court is responsible for budgetary decisions, tax and revenue decisions, and all personnel decisions except for certain positions that are either elected or appointed by the judiciary or other committees. The court is relevant to purchasing of energy efficient technologies because it approves all retrofit or new construction plans and expenditures and any purchases over \$15,000. Therefore, departments are not encouraged to work together in procurement initiatives, since this would require approval from the County Commissioners.

Ultimate decision-making authority within Bexar County rests with the County Commissioners Court, including energy efficiency and procurement matters.

Procurement in Bexar County

The purchasing department processes approximately \$33 million dollars per year in purchasing requests. The purchasing department works on a requisition basis, handling the bidding and vendor selection for purchased equipment. The department **submitting** the requisition selects the necessary technology and thus most influences the selection of energy efficient equipment. Since procurement officers are often nothing more than paper pushers, they have little incentive to learn about the advantages that energy efficient equipment provides, or promote a standardized procurement policy.

The role of the purchasing department, as in many city and county governments, is largely administrative.

Energy efficiency has also received a “bad rap” in Bexar County. Several years ago, a former administrator was known for “draconian” efficiency measures which included cutting lighting wattage levels in offices and hallways creating a difficult and in some cases dangerous work environment. The measures generated significant complaints, and energy efficiency is still associated with negative connotations. Thus, Bexar County must overcome these misconceptions regarding energy efficiency, before it can begin to implement an effective energy efficiency policy.

Furthermore, energy efficiency is rarely a consideration in purchases, since bids are evaluated on purchase cost rather than life cycle cost. Bids are evaluated based on purchase cost rather than life cycle cost. Lastly, qualifications specific to energy efficiency are not requested and are not considered within the selection of architects and engineers.

Since there is no written policy to consider energy efficiency in new construction, expansions, or general purchasing requests, energy efficiency procurement depends upon pioneering personalities or contractors to recommend improvements. **For energy efficiency to become a consideration within Bexar County will require fundamental changes in the County’s policies and perceptions.**